

## Letters to the Editors

# Is using Nazi research to condemn homeopathy ethical or scientific?

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According to Professor Edzard Ernst, the Nazis tested homeopathy and obtained results so 'wholly and disastrously negative' [1], German homeopaths have deliberately covered up these findings ever since.

Why raise the issue of the Third Reich's interest in homeopathy now? It is not as if conventional medicine has not benefited from the results of Nazi research: for example, the tests on concentration camp inmates during the Luftwaffe's experiments on the treatment of hypothermia [2, 3]. So homeopathy is not the only cupboard rattling to the sound of the Third Reich's skeletons.

Claiming to expose 'the truth about homeopathy' [1] by calling upon and so appearing to condone acceptability for Nazi research methodology, ignores those in conventional medical circles who still struggle with the ethics of utilizing data obtained via the Third Reich's inhuman bestiality [4]. Therefore, uncritically invoking Nazi research to condemn homeopathy, is arguably unethical.

In the last part of his paper [1], Ernst mentions the Donner documents in support of his claim that the Nazi homeopathy trials failed [5–7]. Inspection of these documents shows they amount to no more than personal recollections, regurgitated many years after World War 2, liberally sprinkled with phrases such as 'as far as I recall', 'if I remember rightly' and so on. Donner is not only extremely vague, the 'evidence' Ernst thinks he has uncovered in these documents amounts to little more than hear-say. Therefore, Ernst's uncritical use of these documents is also unscientific.

Lastly, in asserting that 'The vast majority of those (reviews) that are rigorous conclude that homeopathic medicines fail to generate clinical effects that are different from those of placebo' [1] Ernst cites three references: two are to his own papers, while the third is to the 2005 Lancet meta-analysis by Shang *et al.* [8]. Scientists have criticised this Lancet review [9–14].

There is an important debate going on in the UK about the efficacy and safety of homeopathic remedies. In the

balance are the freedom of choice of many patients who use homeopathic treatment, and the fate of five state funded homeopathic hospitals which provide it. Rightly or wrongly, much of this debate is beginning to centre round how much meaning and relevance should be assigned to clinical trial data [15–18]. Professor Ernst's paper does nothing to advance this debate one way or the other.

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## Reply to Milgrom and Moebius

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My article was invited by the Editor of the Journal and did indeed mention a comprehensive homeopathic research programme which was conducted during the Third Reich. Milgrom and Moebius ask 'why raise the issue... now?'. The question is misleading. I (and many others) have referred to this programme many times before. There are more than 1000 websites on Google about this. Years ago, I even wrote an article specifically dedicated to this subject in the UK homeopaths' journal [1], and it was I who decided 18 years ago to publish Donner's detailed eye-witness account of the programme in my journal *Perfusion* [2–5]. 'Why now' is therefore a nonsensical question. Why again, would be better – and the answer is, because it may be important, both historically and scientifically.

However, Milgrom and Moebius go much further in deceiving the reader by likening this homeopathic research programme to Nazi concentration camp experiments. Had they only glanced at Donner's original report (in German)

[2–5] or read my article about it (in English) [1], they could not have failed to notice that this is very far from the truth. The programme was overseen by the most competent German scientists of that period, including the internationally respected pharmacologist Kuschinski, and there is not a shred of evidence that it was in any way unethical; and certainly it was not conducted in concentration camps! So no skeletons in this closet, and hence not much of a struggle with the ethics of utilizing the information.

Next, Milgrom and Moebius accuse me of using just three references (two of them my own) to back up the conclusion that the clinical effects of homeopathic medicine fail to generate effects that are different from those of placebo. Conveniently, they do not actually name all these references, but instead take issue with Shang's meta-analysis. However, there are good and obvious reasons for citing exactly these three references: the first one [6] is the only published summary of all recent systematic reviews